



## The Universidad de Buenos Aires in the 1970s: analysis of the press release expressing solidarity with Rodolfo Puiggrós

La Universidad de Buenos Aires en la década de 1970: análisis del comunicado de prensa en solidaridad con Rodolfo Puiggrós

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**ABSTRACT** This article reconstructs the historical context surrounding the emission of a press release by authorities of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, expressing their solidarity with historian and university rector Rodolfo Puiggrós after his resignation. In his term, Puiggrós attempted to fuse the institution's scientific and technological plans with the new development model initiated by Héctor Cámpora and the Peronist movement in 1973. The article makes reference to the project of university transformation promoted by Puiggrós, combining the ideological traditions of Marxism, reformism, and nationalism. A few key points, useful for analyzing the reasons behind Puiggrós's resignation, are presented, and the arguments highlighted within this press release, published by Office of Media and Communications on October 5, 1973, are discussed.

**KEY WORDS** History, 20th Century; Universities; Policy Making; Argentina.

**RESUMEN** Este artículo reconstruye el contexto histórico de aparición del comunicado de prensa emitido por las autoridades de la Universidad de Buenos Aires en solidaridad con el historiador y rector de la universidad, Rodolfo Puiggrós, luego de su renuncia. Su gestión intentó ligar los planes científicos y tecnológicos de la institución al nuevo modelo de desarrollo iniciado por Héctor Cámpora y el peronismo en el año 1973. Se hace referencia al proyecto de transformación de la universidad que fue impulsado por Puiggrós y que articuló tradiciones ideológicas marxistas, reformistas y nacionalistas; se introducen algunas claves de lectura para analizar la causa de la renuncia de Puiggrós y se recuperan los argumentos del comunicado de prensa publicado por la Dirección de Prensa y Difusión de la Universidad de Buenos Aires el 5 de octubre de 1973.

**PALABRAS CLAVES** Historia del Siglo XX; Universidades; Formulación de Políticas; Argentina.

## INTRODUCTION

On October 5, 1973, the Office of Media and Communications of the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) (a) issued a press release (1) in support of the administration of Rodolfo Puiggrós, who was the outgoing rector under the university's political overhaul.

The purpose of this overhaul was to adapt the universities to the democratic government that was restored in 1973, after several years of dictatorships and political prescriptions. The measure was announced by Dr. Jorge Taiana, Minister of Education, through the reading of Executive Order 35. In the recitals of the document, it is stated:

That National Liberation demands definitively putting the national universities at the service of the people, for which it is necessary to reformulate the objectives, contents and methods of the education with the participation of all sectors involved in university life [...] Cámpora has decreed the political overhaul of the national universities. (2) [Own translation]

Before his resignation, Puiggrós had held the position of rector of the Universidad de Buenos Aires from May 29, 1973 until September 17, 1974. His arrival to and departure from the position coincided with the ascension and subsequent resignation of President Héctor Cámpora, before the imminent return of Juan Domingo Perón to the presidency.

The causes that prompted Puiggrós to resign were unclear. In a press conference, Puiggrós stated that the request for his resignation had been made by the Minister of Education, Jorge Taiana, without Juan Domingo Perón's knowledge. Puiggrós had had a telephone conversation with Perón in which, according to Puiggrós, Perón had stated that he was unaware of the request for his resignation from the office of rector. According to press sources, the decision to request Puiggrós' resignation was made by Raúl Alberto Lastiri as president of the Argentine Nation after the resignation of Héctor Cámpora (3).

At the time he took office as rector, Rodolfo Puiggrós was a renowned historian, journalist, professor and political activist. During the

1930s, he became a member of the Communist Party and, in response to the political process initiated in 1946, he founded the Communist Labor Movement (MOC) [*Movimiento Obrero Comunista*] along with other intellectuals and political leaders. The MOC was formed from a split in the Communist Party after the Party had refused to support the Peronist political project in the 1940s.

In the administration of Puiggrós as rector of the university, there was an effort to combine the ideas of the Marxist left with nationalist principles within a framework of support for the government of Héctor Cámpora.

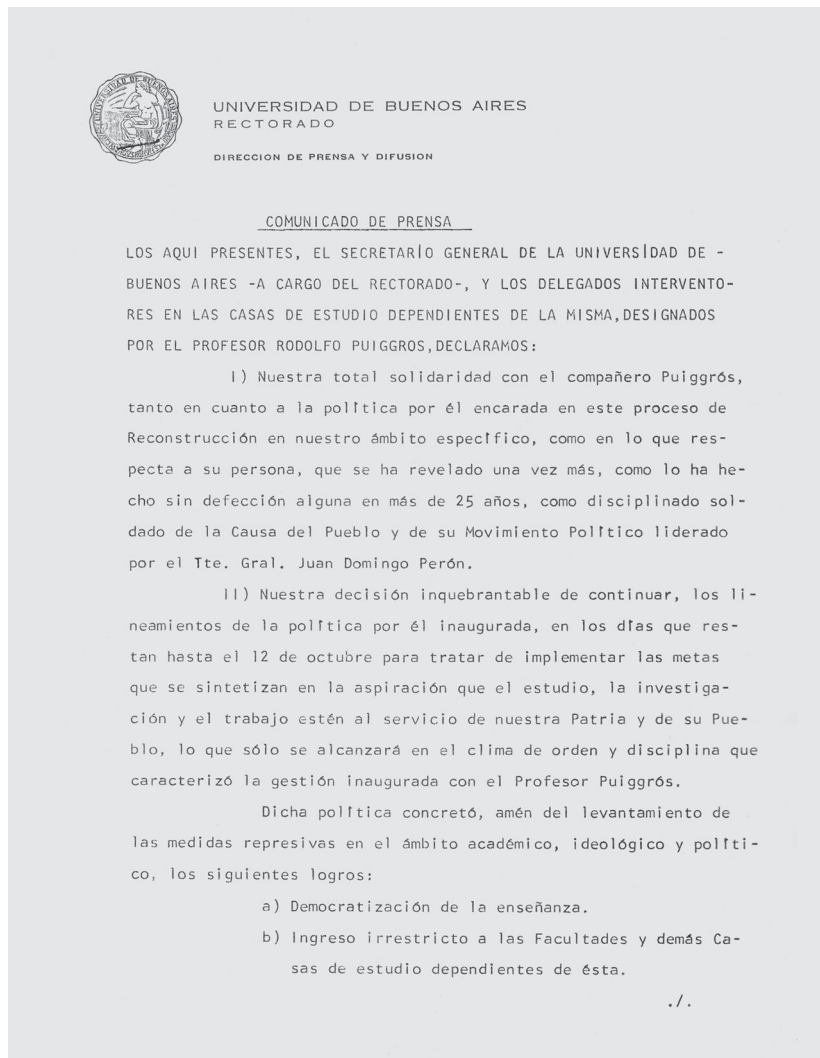
## ABOUT THE STUDY

In order to contextualize the press release, which serves as the main documentary source for this analysis, the following documents have also been consulted:

- Resolutions and informative bulletins published by the UBA from May 29, 1973 to September 19, 1974.
- Press articles published from May 29, 1973 to September 6, 1974.

The documentary sources were compiled by Delia Carnelli de Puiggrós and are part of her personal archive, which she donated to the Human Rights Secretariat of Argentina [*Secretaría de Derechos Humanos de la Nación*] (b). The selected time frame covers the period that begins on the date Rodolfo Puiggrós became rector within the Universidad de Buenos Aires' political overhaul and ends with the last documents kept by his wife before their exile to Mexico (c).

Press releases are a type of document little utilized by historical research studies. Furthermore, studies on the Argentine university have seldom focused on the project initiated in 1973, which represented a new way of organizing the higher education system in connection with the economy, the society, the politics and the culture of the country.



#### PRESS RELEASE

THOSE HERE PRESENT, THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES – IN CHARGE OF THE RECTORATE – AND THE DELEGATES OF THE POLITICAL OVERHAUL IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT DEPEND ON THE UNIVERSITY, APPOINTED BY PROFESSOR RODOLFO PUIGGRÓS, EXPRESS:

I) Our full solidarity with comrade Puiggrós, supporting both the political project he initiated within the process of Reconstruction in our specific area and him as a person. Once again he has proved to be, as he has been for more than 25 years without interruption, a disciplined soldier of the People's Cause and its Political Movement commanded by Lieutenant General Juan Domingo Perón.

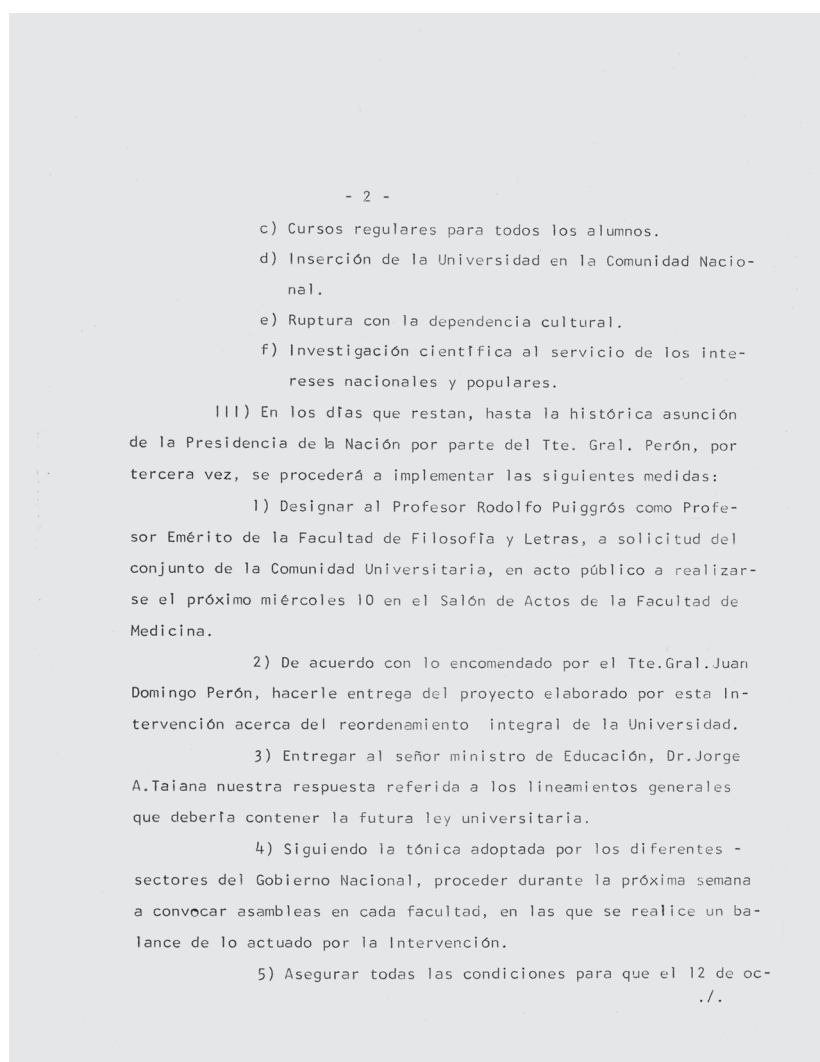
II) Our firm decision to uphold the main features of his policy in the days remaining until October 12, in order to try to fulfill the aims that can be summarized as putting all study, research and work at the service of our Nation and its People. This can only be achieved in an atmosphere of order and discipline, which were characteristic of Professor Puiggrós' administration.

In addition to the abolition of the repressive measures imposed on the academic, ideological and political spheres, this policy has achieved the following objectives:

- a) The democratization of education.
- b) Unrestricted admissions to the University and to the educational institutions that depend on the University.

Figure 1. Press release issued by the authorities of the Universidad de Buenos Aires on October 5, 1973.

Source: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Office of Media and Communications (1).



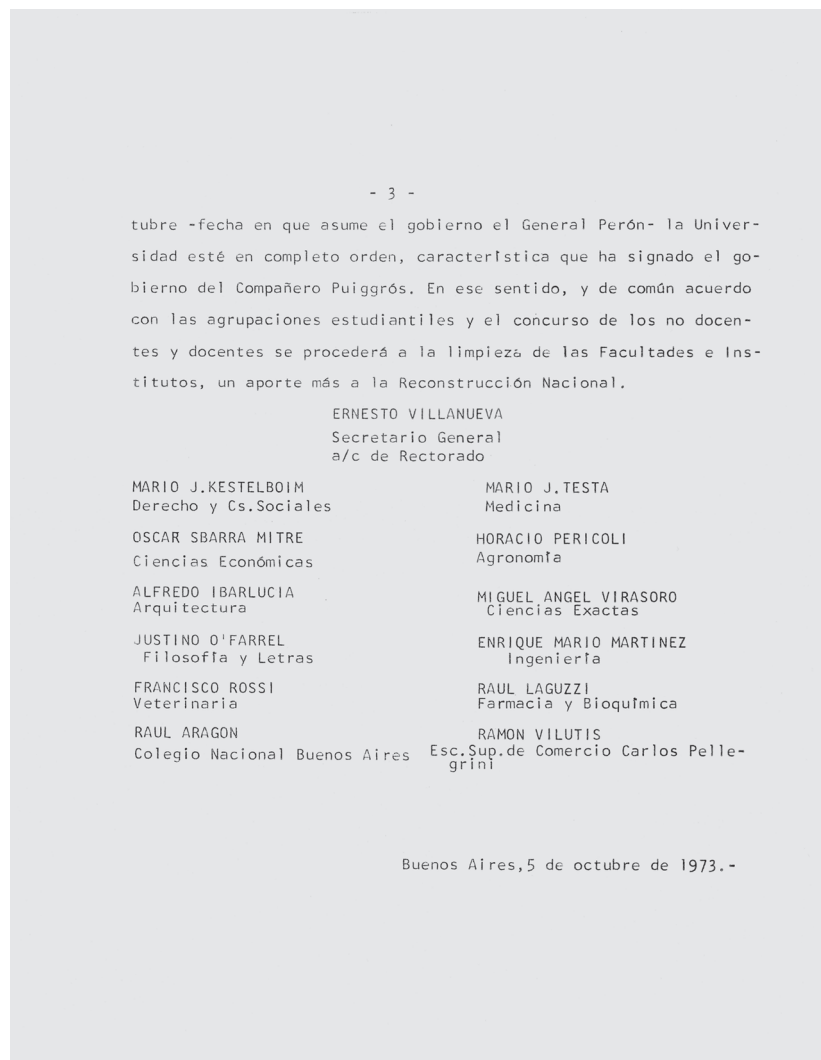
- c) Regular courses for all students.
- d) The insertion of the University within the national community.
- e) A rupture with cultural dependence.
- f) Scientific research at the service of the interests of the nation and its people.

III) Over the days remaining until the historic third rise to office of Lieutenant General Perón as President of the Nation, we commit to the implementation of the following measures:

- 1) The appointment of Professor Rodolfo Puiggrós as Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, upon request of the entire University Community, in a public ceremony to be held next Wednesday, October 10 in the Assembly Hall of the Faculty of Medicine.
- 2) In accordance with the orders of Lieutenant General Juan Domingo Perón, the formal presentation of the project elaborated by the Political Overhaul regarding the comprehensive reorganization of the University.
- 3) The delivery of our response to Dr. Jorge A. Taiana, Minister of Education, regarding the main features that the future University Law should possess.
- 4) Following the tendency adopted by the different sectors of the National Government, the organization of assemblies in all the faculties, which shall conduct an assessment of the actions carried out by the political overhaul.
- 5) The guarantee of the necessary conditions so that on October 12...

Figure 1. Continued.

Source: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Office of Media and Communications (1).



– the date Juan Domingo Perón assumes the Presidency – the University is in perfect order, as it has been during Puiggrós' administration. For that reason, in agreement with the student groups and with the collaboration of professors and staff, we will undertake a general cleaning of the Faculties and Institutions, which represents another contribution to the project of National Reconstruction.

Figure 1. Continued.

Source: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Office of Media and Communications (1).

## THE PRESS RELEASE

In reading this press release (Figure 1) it can be surmised that there was general agreement to support the outgoing rector: the document was signed by the General Secretary of the institution,

ten deans and the rectors of the Escuela Superior de Comercio Carlos Pellegrini and the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, high schools dependent on the Universidad de Buenos Aires. The signature of Dr. Alberto F. Banfi, the dean of the Faculty of Odontology, who had been proposed to replace Puiggrós as rector, does not appear in

the document. Banfi's designation was carried out through Executive Order 1574/73. When Banfi eventually asked to be replaced, Ernesto Villanueva became the new rector (7).

On the other hand, Puiggrós' departure was questioned by the Peronist University Youth (JUP) [*Juventud Universitaria Peronista*], whose members occupied all the faculties of the Universidad de Buenos Aires as an act of protest (8).

The press release is organized into three sections. Section I is focused on showing support for the outgoing rector both as a figurehead and as a person; the text establishes "full solidarity with comrade Puiggrós, supporting both the political project he initiated within the process of Reconstruction in our specific area and him as a person" (1). The signatories of the document highlight the commitment of Puiggrós to the Peronist political project.

Section II stresses the need to ratify and expand the institutional changes introduced in the UBA starting on May 29. The signatories mention the importance of ratifying the "achievements" of the administration. Among these achievements, they highlight the democratization of education, unrestricted admissions to the institution, the insertion of the university within the national community and a rupture with what they call *cultural dependence*.

The proposal to insert the university in the national community was a characteristic feature of the initiative of the institution, which was concerned with the articulation of academic activities within the plans and projects of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the region.

After resigning, Puiggrós submitted a brief report on his administration entitled "90 medidas más importantes de la Universidad Nacional y Popular de Buenos Aires, en los primeros 90 días de gobierno universitario" [The 90 most important measures of the Universidad Nacional y Popular de Buenos Aires taken during the first 90 days of university government] (9) (a). In the report, the rector highlights the elimination of the repressive apparatus, the creation of student scholarships, and the promotion of a health system for students. The democratization of education and the unrestricted admissions were aimed at abolishing the prohibitions and rules enforced in the university by the military regime that preceded the political overhaul promoted by the democratic

government. His administration also advanced in the reinstatement of those professors who had been dismissed for political reasons since 1955.

As was mentioned, the signatories highlighted the importance of continuing the efforts aimed at overcoming "cultural dependence." In order to achieve that aim, modifications to the curricula were proposed in most of the faculties of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Furthermore, the ties between the UBA and multinational companies that could alter the focus of national knowledge production were examined. For that purpose, Rodolfo Puiggrós passed a resolution stating that "the agreement executed through Resolution 1615/66 with the Ford Foundation for the training of specialists in Agricultural Economics shall be revoked" (10 p.103).

Among other measures taken to combat "cultural dependence," it is worth mentioning the designation of a nationalist intellectual, Arturo Jauretche, as president of EUDEBA, the university publishing house. As Puiggrós remarked:

...we will publish the complete works of Doctor Ramón Carrillo, renowned within the Peronist movement and within Argentine science. We will publish the complete works of Leopoldo Lugones. And we will publish books from all Latin American writers, in an effort to make EUDEBA a continental publishing house, with offices in the capitals of every Latin American country and open to the rest of the third world as well. (11) [Own translation]

Jauretche would eventually publish the works of Héctor Cámpora, Omar Torrijos, Velasco Alvarado and Salvador Allende.

In the press release, the signatories highlighted the importance of coordinating scientific research with "the interests of the nation and its people." To this end, both Puiggrós and his replacement, Ernesto Villanueva, promoted diverse measures, among the most important of which were:

- The creation of the Manuel Ugarte Third World Institute [*Instituto del Tercer Mundo "Manuel Ugarte"*], in which discussion sessions were held and studies on Latin America and Third World issues were promoted.
- The opening of Pilot Centers for Applied Research [*Centros Pilotos de Investigación Aplicada*].



Within this context, the decision made by Ernesto Villanueva as rector of the political overhaul through Resolution 895 on November 21, 1973 is significant. The resolution established that:

...any professor with full-time dedication to this university may be sent away for a four-month term, once for every three years of work in this educational institution, to provide education and research services for any public agency from any part of the country or for any University in the interior of the country. (12)  
[Own translation]

Section III of the press release makes special mention of the decision to name Puiggrós Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. He was finally appointed Extraordinary Professor Emeritus of the UBA through Resolution 629/73.

It is worth highlighting that, in this section of the press release, the signatories commit to providing a response to the Minister of Education regarding the main features a new university law should possess. This law was passed on March 14, 1974 under number 20654. Section 1 of this new "Organic Law of National Universities" expresses that:

National Universities are work communities which form part of the national higher education system. They are aimed at teaching, researching, promoting the national culture, producing goods and providing services with

social impacts, and aiding in the solution of the greatest problems of Argentina by making useful and necessary contributions to the process of national liberation. (13) [Own translation]

The press release ends with the signatories' decision to guarantee institutional stability for the inauguration of Juan Domingo Perón on October 12, 1973, a goal that was successfully accomplished.

## DISCUSSION

The press release offers insight into some of the features of the university proposal promoted by the third Peronist government. As can be observed, the initiative put into debate many aspects of UBA's functioning and the liberal and reformist academic traditions. Within that context, some attempts were developed to coordinate science with independent national development, within an atmosphere of active participation of youth in the political context of the time.

In addition, the press release reveals the strong political ruptures occurring in that context. Puiggrós' enigmatic departure from the rectorate was a statement of the difficulties faced by the administration of the national government. In the end, the initiatives for the modification of the UBA were left undeveloped, due to an escalation of political violence that culminated in the civic-military dictatorship which began in March of 1976.

## END NOTES

a. The authorities within the university's political overhaul changed the name of the institution to Universidad Nacional y Popular de Buenos Aires [National and Popular University of Buenos Aires].

b. The personal archive of Delia Carnelli de Puiggrós is currently being digitized in the Archivo Nacional

de la Memoria [National Memory Archive] of the Human Rights Secretariat of Argentina (4,5).

c. During her exile in Mexico, Delia Carnelli de Puiggrós made a compilation of press clippings. Part of those records, comprising the period of 1973-1977, has been digitized and is currently available for public access at the website of the Rodolfo Puiggrós Library of the Universidad Nacional de Lanús (6).

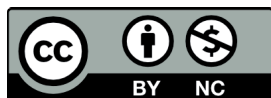
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